

CHAPTER 3

Seating Arrangements

The seating arrangements of any type of function are very important. The host and hostess who take care to ensure a proper balance of protocol and common sense will find their event to be more enjoyable and therefore more successful.

The first step in preparing a seating arrangement should be to consider the type of function as well as the guests involved.

If one were to host a formal dinner inviting high-ranking guests of similar backgrounds who know one another very well, then strictly adhering to the rule of seating by rank would be easy. Such a situation is more the exception than the rule, however. Usually a guest list includes persons of varying ranks, career backgrounds, and nationalities. The primary concern should be to ensure that guests enjoy themselves. Therefore, bear in mind the importance of seating by rank to an extent, but also mix the group a bit so as to create an environment for interesting and enjoyable conversation.

The following discussion deals with the rules of seating guests by rank. Use these rules coupled with the nature and purpose of the individual function to determine seating of guests.

The place of honor is to the right of the host if the guest is a woman, and to the right of the hostess if the guest is a man. Generally, when the event involves both men and women, guests are seated alternating man and woman. This would place the ranking man to the right of the hostess and the ranking woman to the right of the host. Guests are then seated alternating left to right from the host and hostess after the honored guest is seated. As far as knowing who ranks whom, refer to the precedence list in Chapter 1 for guidance.

Generally the guest of honor is also the highest-ranking person. Occasionally, there will be other guests who outrank the guest of honor. When this occurs, elect one of the following courses of action by considering the personalities and the particular situation involved.

1. Place the guest of honor in the honored position making the ranking guest next in line.
2. Seat the guests strictly according to protocol disregarding the fact that the guest of honor may be well down the table (used when there are many very high-ranking officials).
3. Make the senior guest the co-host or co-hostess if it is an all-male or all-female event.

Spouses who do not hold official positions themselves are seated according to the rank of their husbands/wives. It is often preferable to avoid seating husbands and wives together, but, once again, many situations are such that husbands and wives may be more comfortable if seated together.

When seating a group of foreign officials among U.S. officials, alternating them so as not to group them all together is recommended.

An interpreter may be required at a dinner for a foreign dignitary. The interpreter should sit close to the dignitary and the person for whom he/she is interpreting. The interpreter's duties are so demanding that he/she will find it difficult to eat and interpret at the same time.

SEATING DIAGRAMS

The following diagrams are to aid in visualizing how guests would be seated according to rank:

USUAL MIXED DINNERS

The most traditional arrangement calls for the host and hostess to sit at the two ends of the table (Plan 1a.):

Plan 1a. – Host/hostess at ends of table

	Hostess			
Man	1		2	Man
Woman	3		4	Woman
Man	5	(14)	6	Man
Woman	6		5	Woman
Man	5		3	Man
Woman	2		1	Woman
	Host			

At larger official dinners/luncheons, the host and hostess may sit opposite one another at the center of the table (Plan 1b.):

Plan 1b. – Host/hostess at mid-table

Man	8		7	Man (5 Man)*
Woman	6		5	Woman (7 Woman)*
Man	4		3	Man
Woman	2		1	Woman
Host		(18)		Hostess
Woman	1		2	Man
Man	3		4	Woman
Woman	5		6	Man (8 Woman)*
Man	7		8	Woman (6 Man)*

*This arrangement leads to placing a woman on the end of the table on both sides. To avoid this, switch them with the man seated closest as shown or use the following alternate seating plan (Plan 1c):

Plan 1c. – Two at each end of table

	Man	Hostess	
	1		
Woman	3	2	Man
Man	5	4	Woman
Woman	7	6	Man
Man	8	(18)	8
Woman	6	7	Man
Man	4	5	Woman
Woman	2	3	Man
	Host	Woman	

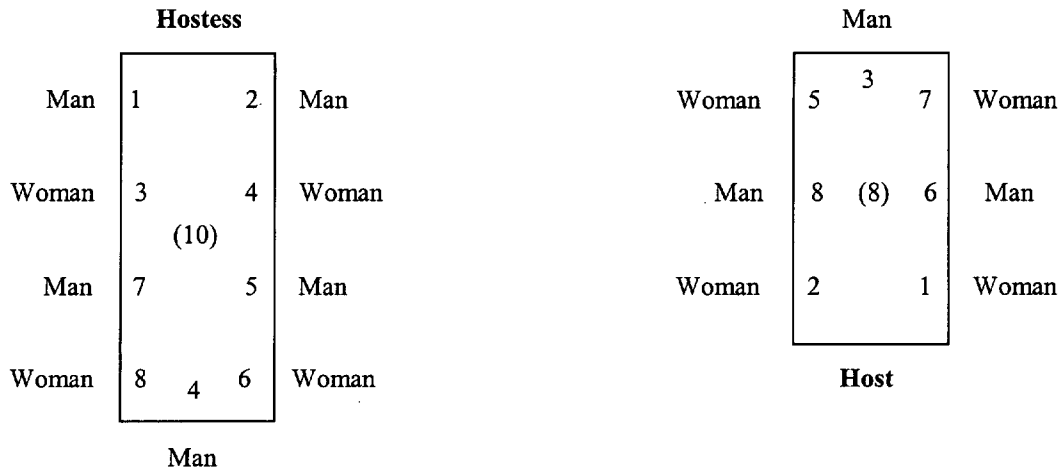
Another arrangement uses two tables (Plan 1d. and 1e.):

Plan 1d. – Host/hostess at separate tables (number divisible by four)

	Hostess		
Man	1	2	Man
Woman	3	(8)	5
Man	6	4	Man
	Woman		

	Man		
Woman	4	7	6
Man	3	(8)	5
Woman	2	1	Woman
	Host		

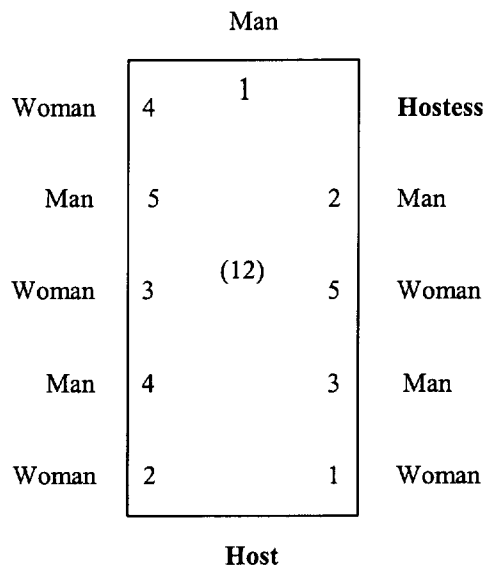
Plan 1e. – Host/hostess at separate tables



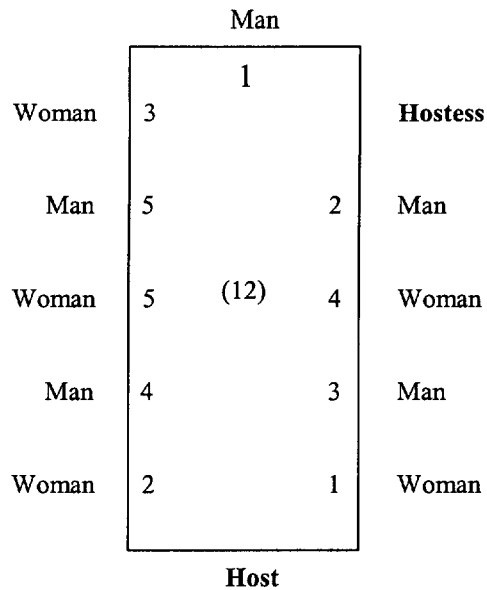
MIXED DINNERS
(Multiples of Four)

Whenever the total number of guests equals any multiple of four and there is an equal number of men and women, the host and hostess cannot sit opposite each other without putting two men or two women together. To balance the table, the hostess simply moves one seat to the left, thereby putting her right-hand guest (guest of honor) opposite the host. See plan 2a. When one couple of such a group is unmarried, they may be seated side-by-side, see plan 2b. A third plan often used by contemporary hostesses is that for the round table. See plan 2c.

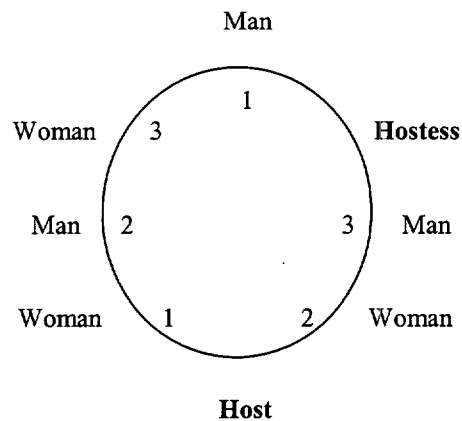
Plan 2a. – Multiples of four – all couples married



Plan 2b. – Multiples of four – one couple unmarried



Plan 2c. – Multiples of four – all couples married – round table

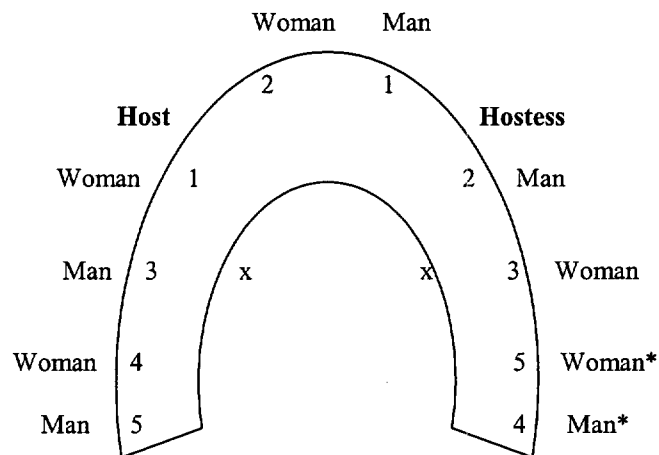


MIXED DINNERS – AT HORSESHOE-SHAPED TABLE

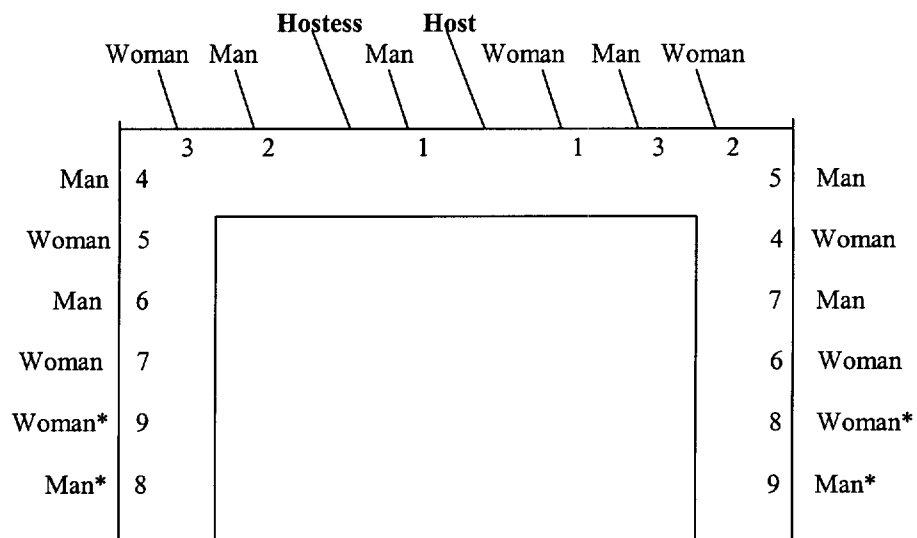
The simple horseshoe-shaped table which is sometimes used at large official banquets requires that the host and hostess sit with their honored guests on the outside of the curving center while other guests are seated in an alternating pattern along the sides. See plan 3a. Plan 3b is an alternate occasionally seen at formal dinners.

If places are set both within and without the curving ends, the inside seats begin at point x on plan 3a, with the seats inside but nearer the host ranking those further away on the outside.

Plan 3a. – Horseshoe-shaped table with couples



Plan 3b. – Alternate plan for horseshoe-shaped table with couples



* Arrangement avoids placing a woman at the end of the table.

MIXED DINNERS – WITH SINGLE HOST/HOSTESS

An unmarried host/hostess, or one who is entertaining in the absence of his/her spouse may choose one of the following arrangements:

Plan 4a. – Single host with co-host

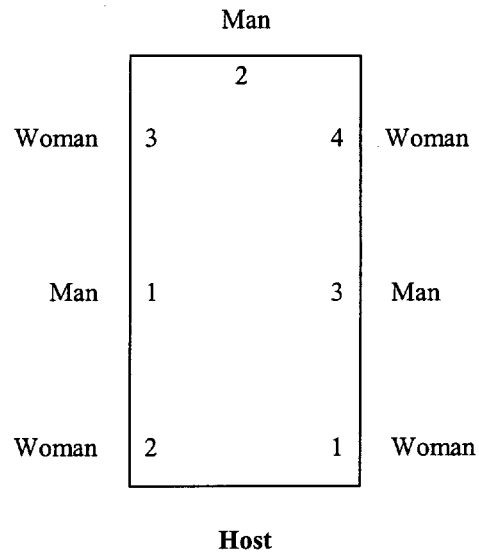
Man	9	6	Man
Woman	8	5	Woman
Man	5	2	Man
Woman	4	1	Woman
Co-Host			Host
Woman	2	3	Woman
Man	3	4	Man
Woman	6	7	Woman
Man	7	8	Man

or Plan 4b. – Single hostess with co-hostess

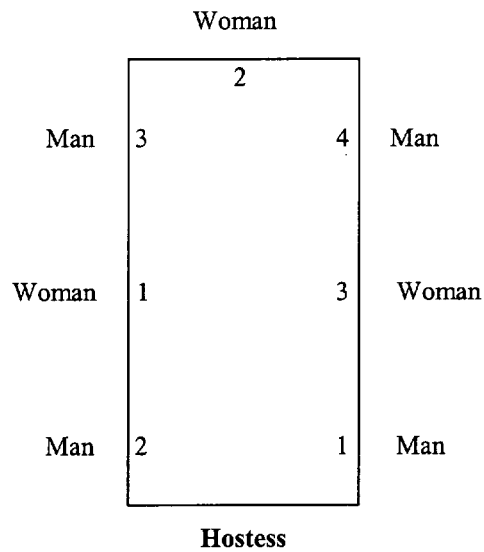
(8 Man)*	Woman	9	6	Woman	(5 Man)*
(9 Woman)*	Man	8	5	Man	(6 Woman)*
	Woman	5	2	Woman	
	Man	4	1	Man	
Co-Hostess				Hostess	
	Man	2	3	Man	
	Woman	3	4	Woman	
(7 Woman)*	Man	6	7	Man	(8 Woman)*
(6 Man)*	Woman	7	8	Woman	(7 Man)*

* Arrangement avoids placing women at the ends of the table.

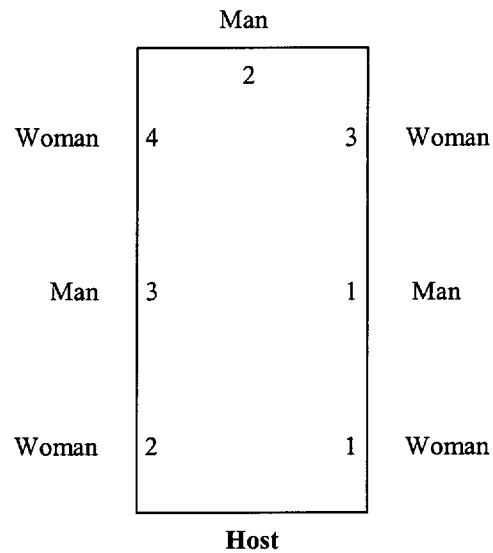
Plan 4c. – No co-host/co-hostess; all married couples



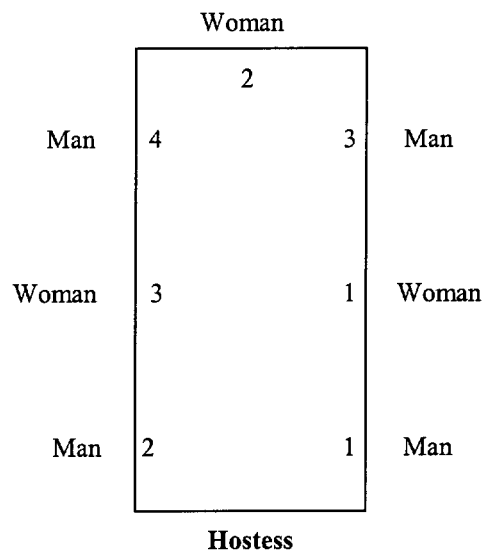
or Plan 4d.



Plan 4e. – No co-host/co-hostess; not all married couples



or Plan 4f.:



ALL MALE / ALL FEMALE
LUNCHEONS AND DINNERS

For all-male or all-female events, it is often desirable to designate a co-host/co-hostess.

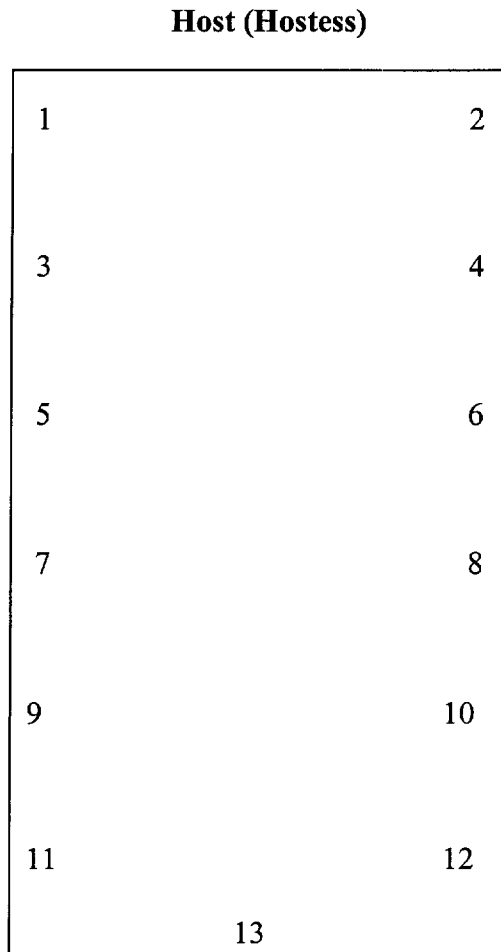
Plan 5a. – With co-host/co-hostess

(Co-Hostess) Co-Host

16	13
12	9
8	5
4	1
2	3
6	7
10	11
14	15

Host (Hostess)

Plan 5b. – Without co-host/co-hostess



HEAD TABLES

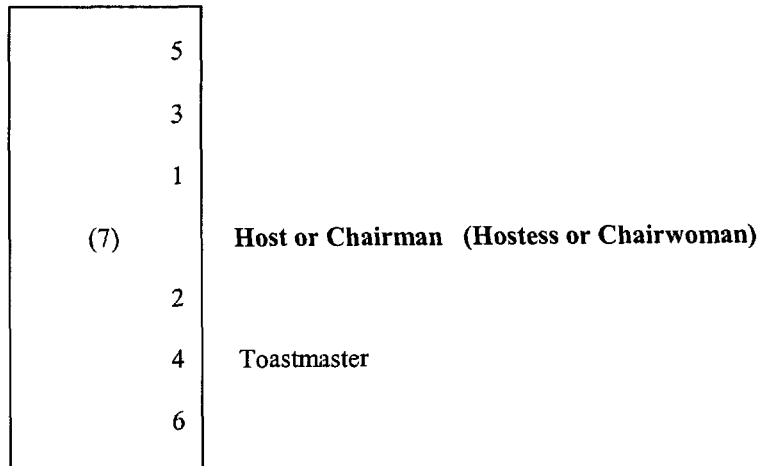
Seating arrangements for head tables cause great concern and require special treatment. There are head tables required for all-male or all-female affairs, or for mixed groups, with and without speakers, with and without club officers, etc.

In seating a low-ranking toastmaster and guest speakers at an all-male or all-female luncheon or dinner, the host/hostess must use judgment in placing them as near the center of the table as possible without violating precedence too much. The main speaker or a guest of honor who is outranked by others present should not be seated in seat 1; however, it is proper to place him/her to the left of the host/hostess in seat 2, if appropriate, or seat 3. See Plan 6a.

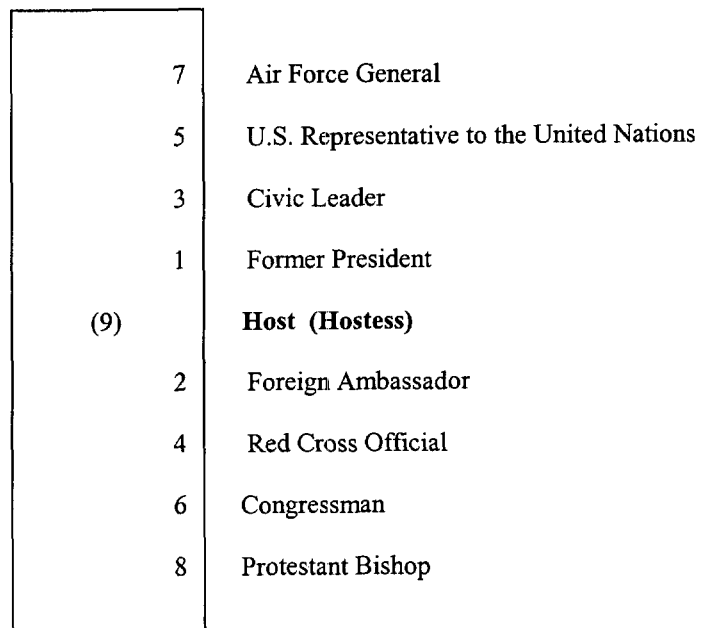
When both official and very important unofficial guests are present, distinguished civilians who represent significant civic or philanthropic organizations may be seated between the guests of official rank after the guest of honor and second official guest are seated. See Plan 6b.

Often it is necessary to seat couples at a head table. Plan 6d provides for this circumstance.

Plan 6a. – With low-ranking toastmaster



Plan 6b. – With important official and civilian guests



Plan 6c. – With guests and club officers

(13)	Club Officer
	Guest 5
	Club Secretary
	Guest 3
	Honorary President
	Guest 1
	President
	Guest 2
	Club Vice President
	Guest 4
	Club Treasurer
	Guest 6
	Club Officer

Plan 6d. – With couples

(12)	5	Man
	4	Woman
	3	Man
	1	Woman
		Host
	2	Woman
	1	Man
		Hostess
	2	Man
	3	Woman
	5	Woman*
	4	Man*

*Arrangement avoids placing a woman at the end of the table.